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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001551

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FIGURE TSHISEKEDI AND THE SUCCESSION QUESTION

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

1. (C) SUMMARY: A top official in opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi's political party, the UDPS, said some of

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Tshisekedi's lieutenants are working to succeed him as party

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leader. The idea of "inheriting" the party is optimistic, since it is identified so closely with Tshisekedi and would likely shrink to a shadow of its former self if he dies or retires. END SUMMARY.

A Brewing Succession Fight?

2. (C) "Union pour la Democratie et le Progres Social" Secretary-General Remy Masama-ma-Kiese told poloff 12 August

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some party cadres including he himself are trying to position themselves to succeed UDPS leader Etienne Tshisekedi. (Note: Tshisekedi is over seventy, and is reportedly not in the best of health. He rarely makes public appearances. End Note.) Masamba intends to organize a party congress in December 2004 or January 2005, which, if successful and well-managed, will boost his chances at succeeding Tshisekedi. At present, he is desperately looking for money

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to pay for the congress.

3. (C) Masamba, who is from Bas-Congo rather than the Kasais like Tshisekedi, said the UDPS risked being accused of tribalism if Tshisekedi's successor is also a Kasaian, therefore he sees his non-Kasaian identity as a plus. Nonetheless, one of Masamba's main competitors for the job is Mr. Alexis Mutanda, director/editor of the newspaper "La Tempete des Tropiques" and the party's national secretary for relations with UDPS federations abroad. Mutanda, a Kasaian, is in turn backed by Jonas Mukamba, a party elder and wealthy financier. Masamba said the only one of Tshisekedi's sons who is politically active is Felix Tshisekedi, president of the UDPS federation in Belgium, but he apparently is not interested in succeeding his father.

4. (C) As for Tshisekedi himself, Masamba said he is hoping to receive an invitation to travel to the U.S. to attend the Republican Party convention in September. (Note: Tshisekedi recently participated in a National Democratic Institute conference in the U.S. that coincided with the Democratic Party convention. Virtually all local media reported that he traveled to attend the latter. End Note.) Long-term, Masamba speculated that the party leader could be persuaded or encouraged to become the Congo's "Mandela," a respected individual who does not hold public office but could nonetheless help bring peace throughout the region. (Comment: This would be a stretch. Tshisekedi has name recognition and some loyal supporters, but is seen as far too partisan and proud to ever be accepted as a neutral public figure. Nor is it likely that Tshisekedi would ever willingly give up his long quest for national leadership. End Comment.)

COMMENT

5. (C) The idea of "inheriting" the UDPS from Tshisekedi is optimistic, since the party is identified so closely with him. If Tshisekedi were to retire or die, the party would likely shrink to a shadow of its former self. Any non-Kasaian would have difficulty in maintaining the allegiance of the party's core Kasaian supporters. END

COMMENT.

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